The National Tribune.

"TO CARE FOR HIM WHO HAS BORNE THE BATTLE, AND FOR HIS WIDOW AND ORPHANS."

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ARMY ANECDOTES.

Some "Humors" Connected With the Service Ashore and Afloat.

THE RETORT COURTEOUS.

An American Officer Challenges a British Mess.

IRISH REPARTEE.

Volunteers Had Little Respect for Official Dignity.

BY ABNER DOUBLEDAY, BREVET MAJOR-GENERAL, U. S. A., MENDHAM, N. J.

THE abstract principles which underlie the philosophy of the ludicrous have recently been ably treated in the magazines. It is proposed herewith simply to give a few examples in the concrete of wit, humor, and repartee as applied to army and navy life; more particularly to the former.

I was told by a talented literary lady that some years ago a professor in a Western college wrote an article on the same subject in relation to occurrences in the Revolutionary war. As I have never seen this essay, and have at present no data to refer to, I cannot go back to that period. Nor have I any information in relation to the witty sayings and doings of our army during the second war with Great Britain. When I left West Point, however, there were many old officers who had been engaged in that struggle. One of them told me an anecdote, which seems to be worth relating as a specimen of the "retort courteous," and as it has a historical flavor I repeat it.

A certain Col. Loomis, who, if my memory serves me, was on the staff of Gen. Dearborn, on the Canadian frontier, was the hero of the episode. The Colonel was a great duelist, as a man had to be in those days to retain any standing in the army, and he was very quick on the trigger where questions of honor were concerned. On one occasion he passed through the lines bearing a flag of truce for Sir George Prevost, who was Governor-General of Canada. Sir George received the missive, read it, and came out of his quarters in a towering rage. He said to Col. Loomis, angrily:

"WHAT IS THE MEANING OF THIS, SIR?

The paper you have brought me is of no importance. It refers to a mere matter of routine, and should have been handed in at the outposts. Why have you come all this distance to bring it in person, conveying the idea that it was a matter of great consequence?"

The Colonel replied, with a low bow: "I had a strong desire to see the celebrated Sir George Prevost, of whom I had heard so much, and I resorted to this method of doing so."

This flattering answer somewhat mollified the wrath of the British commander, and he said, in a grumbling way: "Well, stay and take dinner with us, then."

Col. Loomis accordingly remained, but did not find the British officers either sociable or polite. They evidently looked upon his presence as a Yankee intrusion. The dinner was an irksome affair, and passed off in a constrained and silent way. At last, when the meal was over and the time had come for the usual toasts, one of the officers rose, and in a grum voice proposed "The President of the United States—dead or alive."

All eyes were on Loomis, who drank the toast without making any remark. He then rose in his turn and proposed "The Prince Regent, drunk or sober."

At this time George the III. had been pronounced insane, and his son, George IV., was acting in his stead. The British officers sprang to their feet and exclaimed, "Why, this is an insult!" "It is a reply to one, at all events," answered he, taking out his card-case and passing one rapidly to each person at the table, which was equivalent to so many challenges. The Colonel who presided over the mess interfered as the officers were about to pick up the cards, saying, "The retort is a rough one, but we provoked it, and as this gentleman is our guest we will have to overlook it. I will hold anybody responsible myself who takes the matter up." So the quarrel ended peacefully and Col. Loomis returned home

WITH FLYING COLORS.

This "retort courteous" reminds me of one that took place soon after I was graduated. Two officers of the Regular Army had had a disagreement. Although they were attached to the same company they never held any intercourse with each other, except officially and in the strict line of duty. At last they separated, mutually exasperated. After several years had elapsed the junior in rank happened to stop for the night at a post commanded by his old antagonist, and called upon him in full uniform. The latter drew himself up and said haughtily:

"To what, sir, am I indebted for the honor of this visit?"

The other, stiff as a ramrod, replied: "To Army Regulations, paragraph 709, on page 265, which says that whenever a junior officer happens to be at a post commanded by a senior he must call upon him officially."

As may be supposed, the interview was rather embarrassing and did not last long.

Reporters frequently write rapid and illegible reports of military operations, and the printer who sets up the copy, not being able to understand the meaning, is pretty sure to make some ludicrous mistake. In a military parade in Washington city, instead of referring to Col. G. W. Wallace as commanding the 12th Inf. and garrison of Washington, he was represented as a grandson of Washington. Whereupon the two Adjutants-General in Wallace's office sat down and, in a spirit of fun, wrote him a fierce letter demanding by what authority he called himself

A GRANDSON OF WASHINGTON.

They signed this epistle with the name of Peter G. Washington, a noted politician, who held a high office under the Administration at the Capital, but who never claimed to be related to the Father of his Country. Wallace wrote a scathing reply and brought it down to read to the two staff officers, but when he saw the attempts they made to suppress their merriment he appreciated the situation, laughed at the joke, and tore up his letter.

Another reporter, in writing up the proceedings of a G.A.R. meeting, referred to the presiding officer as a battle-scarred veteran. It was printed *battle-scared* veteran, and a subsequent attempt to correct it changed it to *bottle-scarred* veteran.

I believe every Army officer of experience will testify that fully two-thirds of the odd and witty speeches made during a campaign came from our Irish comrades.

In the Shenandoah Valley campaign an officer found that some of his men had managed to slip a demijohn of whisky into one of the wagons, in consequence of which they were becoming quite hilarious. He stopped the train, took the demijohn out, and emptied it on the grass. An Irish soldier, who was very much interested in this proceeding, looked on ruefully at the sacrifice, and said to one of his companions:

"Dennis, if I'm kilt in the next battle, bring me back and bury me here."

I once knew a Colonel who was highly distinguished in the Mexican war. I believe he was never accused of drunkenness, but he had no objection to the use of stimulants. As he was about starting out on an expedition against the Indians in Texas, a young officer, fresh from West Point, came to him and said:

"Colonel, I understand that we will be absent for several weeks. I have a small bundle of books I would like to put in one of the wagons, if you do not object."

The Colonel replied:

"My young friend, it would give me great pleasure to oblige you, but as we have hardly enough transportation for the food we are obliged to carry, I fear that I cannot oblige you; for every pound counts."

A moment afterward another officer came up and said in a low tone:

"I have a barrel of excellent commissary whisky,"—an article which was occasionally issued to extra-duty men in those days,—"don't you think we could

MANAGE TO TAKE IT ALONG?"

"Oh, certainly!" replied the Colonel. "Anything in reason! Anything in reason!"

This, however, is a digression, for I was speaking of Irish wit.

A Naval officer told me that he overheard an Irish sailor say, in reference to a very tyrannical officer, who was thoroughly detested by the crew:

"Sure, when the Lieutenant dies, there will be many a dry eye."

The natives of the Emerald Isle are always ready with an evasive reply to exculpate themselves. An officer at one of our Army inspections noticed a dark rim around a soldier's shirt-collar, and said to him:

"Rafferty!"

"Sor."

"How long do you wear a shirt?"

"*Two fort three inches and a quarther, your Honor,*" was the unexpected answer.

I was told of another case which illustrates the same readiness. An officer of rank, who was in great haste to keep an appointment, found his carriage stopped by a line of stones which barred his way, placed there by some laborers who were pulling up

"EYE, BURY ME HERE."

the pavement to repair a sewer. He called out angrily:

"Throw those stones to hell!"

The man nearest to him grinned, and replied:

"Faith, I'm afraid they'd be more in your honor's way there than they are here."

I am not sure about this story. There seems to be a flavor of antiquity about it, for I think something of the kind is stated about Dr. Abernethy; so if it is not original we will call it *ben trovato*.

There are others, however, for which I can vouch.

After our troops captured the City of Mexico they marched through the principal streets and occupied

THE MAIN PLAZA.

Notwithstanding the capitulation and the surrender of the place by the constituted authorities, cowardly shots were frequently fired by the Mexicans from the windows and roofs, and Gen. Worth, becoming highly incensed, gave permission to the men to break into and sack any of the houses which violated the truce in this way. When quiet was partially restored an officer noticed an Irish soldier marching like a sentry back and forth in the middle of the main street, opposite the cathedral, and asked him—

"Who put you on guard there?"

"I put meself, sor."

"For what purpose?"

"I'm standing for bait."

"What do you mean by that?"

"The General says if they fire on us from the houses we can go in and sack them. Them's all jewelers' shops, and I'm standing for bait."

When Gen. Sumner invaded the Navajo country one of the enemy, while prowling around the camp on a dark night, was killed by a Sergeant of the Guard. The General complimented him on his vigilance, which was all very well; but he added that, in the dangerous position in which the troops were placed, this Sergeant must be retained on guard for some days. The Sergeant, worn out with watching and fatigue, declared that, "if the Lord spared him, he never would kill another Indian as long as he lived."

This story contains a moral. Many Generals during the late war acted on the principle that where troops had distinguished themselves by extraordinary gallantry, they were to be selected

TO LEAD EVERY FORLORN HOPE;

which was a poor way to reward meritorious services of this kind.

Apropos of this, there is a story of an Irish regiment which served under Wellington in the Peninsula. The Duke had reprimanded them for failing to hold a position which had been assigned them. In the next battle, anxious to redeem their reputation, they went to the front and were nearly all massacred. As the Duke rode by after the action, looking regretfully at the mutilated remains of the regiment, one of the soldiers, who was desperately wounded, raised his head and shouted—

"You ould hooky-nosed villain, does this satisfy you?"

Wellington sent his own Surgeon to attend him, and tried every means to save the man, but did not succeed in doing so.

The following story was told me by a Paymaster:

At the beginning of our civil war, when the North was sending troops to the field, the Governor of one of the Western States attempted to raise a regiment to be entirely composed of Irishmen. After filling nine companies with great difficulty, all enlistments ceased. The men, who were kept in camp a long time waiting to complete their organization, at last became so unruly that the Governor shipped them

OFF TO THE SEAT OF WAR.

All this time they had not received a cent of pay. At last a Paymaster was directed to give them their dues, but as soon as he had examined their papers he found he could not pay them, as they had only nine companies instead of the 10 which the law required. So he packed his valise in the night and fled, pursued by the curses and execrations of the men. The expression "When I get me pay" passed into a by-word in the regiment. Another Paymaster came, met with the same difficulty, and disappeared in the same manner as the first, which greatly intensified the excitement. Finally a company of Home Guards was attached to the regiment, and, as its organization was now complete, a third Paymaster, my informant, was sent. On his arrival he asked to be directed to the Colonel's quarters, and a large tent was pointed out to him. He found, however, on reaching it that he had not been correctly informed. It was a hospital tent, and a Catholic priest was administering the last sacrament to a dying man as he entered. The priest said:

"Patrick, are ye willing to lave this sinful world with all its pomp and vanity, and go to another and a better world?"

Patrick raised himself up, and, to the surprise of the Paymaster, said: "It's a domd dirty world, and I'm domd glad to get clear of it."

The attendant said: "Don't say that, Pathrick; sure you have had your own fun out of it."

The priest reproved the man, and said: "When will you, yourself, be prepared to die?"

To this the attendant replied, in a rollicking way,

"WHEN I GET ME PAY!"

A moment afterward, sensible that this was not a proper time for jesting, he began to howl and tear his hair in a genuine Irish-wake fashion.

Perhaps one of the best representative Irishmen in the Army was a man named

"YOU HOOKY-NOSED OLD VILLAIN."

Hoy, who belonged to the 6th Inf. before the war. He was an excellent soldier when sober, but unfortunately that was a rare occurrence. He would go off on a drunken bout and remain until the effects of the liquor wore off. He would then return, walk up to the Officer of the Day, confess his misdeeds, and end by saying:

"An' I said to meself if I go to the Lieutenant and tell him all about it, sure he won't be too hard on a poor bye."

This confession, accompanied with penitence and promises of amendment, frequently stood him in good stead; but at last he became a nuisance from his constant intoxication, and a general court-martial was ordered for his special benefit. One pay day, while in the guard-house awaiting trial, he managed to get liquor in some way, and became very disorderly and riotous. The prison-room was closely packed with culprits, who had become intoxicated on the money they had just received. Hoy swore he could whip the crowd, and undertook to do it. He began striking out to the right and left and singing at the top of his lungs.

AS THE SPACE WAS LIMITED

he caused a great disturbance, which attracted the attention of the Officer of the Day, Lieut. O'Brien, who, by the way, was also an Irishman. O'Brien rushed to the scene, had the door flung open, and called out:

"This noise must be stopped!"

Hoy repeated the order and yelled, "Don't you hear what the Lieutenant says? Stop your noise!"

"But I mean you," said O'Brien.

"Is it me ye mane?"

"Yes, you are the one who is making all the noise."

"And is it Moore's melodies you call a noise?"

To this *jeu d'esprit* O'Brien replied by threatening to have him gagged. This roused the old Irish faction feeling in Hoy, who answered:

"You niver could make them belave in ould Ireland that an O'Brien had gagged a Hoy."

At last the court that had been assembled sentenced Hoy for his manifold sins of drunkenness, to have the buttons cut off his coat, an empty whisky-bottle tied around his neck, and to be drummed out of camp and out of service to the tune of the rogue's march.

On the morning when this sentence was to be executed Hoy was brought out of the guard-house. The tears were streaming down his cheeks, and he soliloquised after this fashion:

"It's not fit I am for the infantry, at all, at all! I shall have to inlist in the artillery or the ingineers!"

Then he turned to the Officer of the Day and said, pointing to the empty whisky bottle:

"Captain, dear, don't you think you could put a wee drop of whisky in it?"

A modest proposition, which was not acceded to.

THE GERMANS

are among the best and steadiest men in the Regular Army. They rarely indulge at attempts at wit, but their imperfect knowledge of our language frequently creates great mirth in others. At one time our recruiting officers enlisted numbers of them who had just landed as emigrants. Men were much wanted at the front, and it was supposed that foreigners could soon acquire enough English for all practical purposes. This proved a great trial for us junior officers who were obliged to instruct them. When I was stationed at Fort McHenry one of them was put as a sentinel over the magazine. After vain attempts to make him understand his duties generally, I at last confined myself to two points, which were that he must salute all officers according to rank, and not allow anyone to set fire to the magazine. When questioned subsequently with regard to his orders he said he was to shoot all officers according to rank and set fire to the magazine.

Recruits in those days were a source of endless trouble to us. They should have been retained at the large depots until thoroughly instructed, but as they were very much needed at the frontier posts, and recruiting was not brisk, they were hurried off, frequently under a single officer, before they had acquired any knowledge of discipline. Their ignorance of rank and the great familiarity with which they addressed their commander was

STARTLING TO WEST POINT OFFICERS,

accustomed to the strict requirements of the service. We were much amused at the answer of one of these newcomers named Martin to the Inspector-General, who asked him if he came from Ticonderoga. The man replied, "Bless your heart, I live more than 20 miles from there." He always went afterwards by the name of "Bless your heart" Martin.

A squad of these raw recruits had just arrived at a post in Texas commanded by Gen. G. They were formed in line early in the morning for inspection in front of the General's tent, when an express came in with news of an Indian incursion. A company was at once ordered out in pursuit. The Captain formed his men immediately, and reported for orders. He was asked if his men had their breakfast, but replied that

STANDING FOR BAIT.

as he understood the case was an urgent one he had not waited for that. "Never mind," said the General, who sometimes indulged in a joke, "perhaps you may get a little Indian meal on your way." One of the recruits, who evidently appreciated this jest, said, "Ha! ha! ha! Good for you, General! Good for you!"

"Sergeant, take that man to the guard-house," was the immediate reply; whereupon the recruit probably learned that it is not permitted to a private to express approbation or disapprobation of his commanding officer's remarks.

AS OUR VOLUNTEER SOLDIERS

are brought up in a Republic, where the doctrine of social equality prevails, it takes some time to inculcate the idea of Army rank among them; for they, in the words of Lowell,

"Would shake hands with a King upon his throne,
And think it kindness to his Majesty."

When McDowell made his headquarters at the Arlington House, opposite Washington, soon after the first Bull Run, I had a desk in the room occupied by his staff, having been, by a special order of Gen. McClellan, assigned to the duty of arming the forts which environed the Capital. I had an Orderly assigned me from one of the new regiments. He had been a clerk in a dry-goods store, and was utterly unconscious of the restraints and requirements of military life. A Regular, when on duty of this kind, always keeps at a reasonable distance, stands at an "attention" when spoken to, and salutes whenever he receives an order, but my new man lounged about in the most familiar way. He told me on the third day that he was tired of this Orderly business, and wanted a "posish," as he expressed it. A British nobleman (or at all events a man who claimed to be such) was acting as Adjutant-General in the same room with me. He was quite deaf, and as it required a good deal of effort to make him understand what was said, his chief soon got rid of him. It seems that a Commissary, whose hearing was also defective, came, and was assigned to duty in the same room. One morning the Adjutant-General came to me to make a complaint. He said in

HIS DRAWLING WAY:

"Upon maw word, aw'm indebted to your Orderly for a very delicate piece of attention.

"What is that, Sir John?" I replied.

"He walked up to me as I came in, gave me a poke in the ribs, pointed to the Commissary, and shouted in my ear, 'We've got another deaf man here now, Sir John.' I was brought up, sir, in the British army, and am not used to such proceedings."

I acknowledged the complaint to be a just one, and sent the Orderly back to his regiment.

There were a good many stories in my day of the naivete of the new cadets at West Point before they became accustomed to discipline. One of these who had just arrived received notice that the Commandant desired to see him immediately. He replied:

"Oh, bother the Commandant. I have just come from a long journey and I'm tired. I am not going to run after anybody. If the Commandant wants to see me let him come over here."

The surprise of the Orderly at being charged with such a message was comical to witness. If any of the older cadets had replied to an order in that way he would have had a taste of the light or dark prison; but everything was forgiven to these inexperienced youths.

Doubtless our late enemies have many stories of this kind to tell in reference to their own experiences in the war, and some one should collect them and put them in print. I heard one a short time ago from a Confederate lady in relation to Gen. Magruder. When Sherman's operations and the action of our fleet had isolated Texas from the rest of the Confederacy, Magruder was in command there, and as he could receive no orders from his superiors he had full sway. One day he entered a restaurant in San Antonio,

DRESSED IN CITIZEN'S CLOTHES.

A Confederate soldier who had been drinking came in soon after and seated himself without ceremony at the same table with the General. Magruder drew himself up angrily, and said:

"Do you know who I am, sir?"

"No," replied the soldier, "and I don't care a continental who you are. When I first entered the army I was very particular about my associates, but now I have become perfectly reckless. You can keep your seat."

Magruder enjoyed the joke, and did not have the man arrested.

This clemency was something like that related of the French General Pelissier. He had struck a soldier in a fit of rage, and the man drew up his musket, aimed at the General, and pulled the trigger. The gun did not explode. The man was immediately seized, the weapon taken from him, and he was sent to the guardhouse. Pelissier preferred charges against him for not keeping his gun in proper firing order.

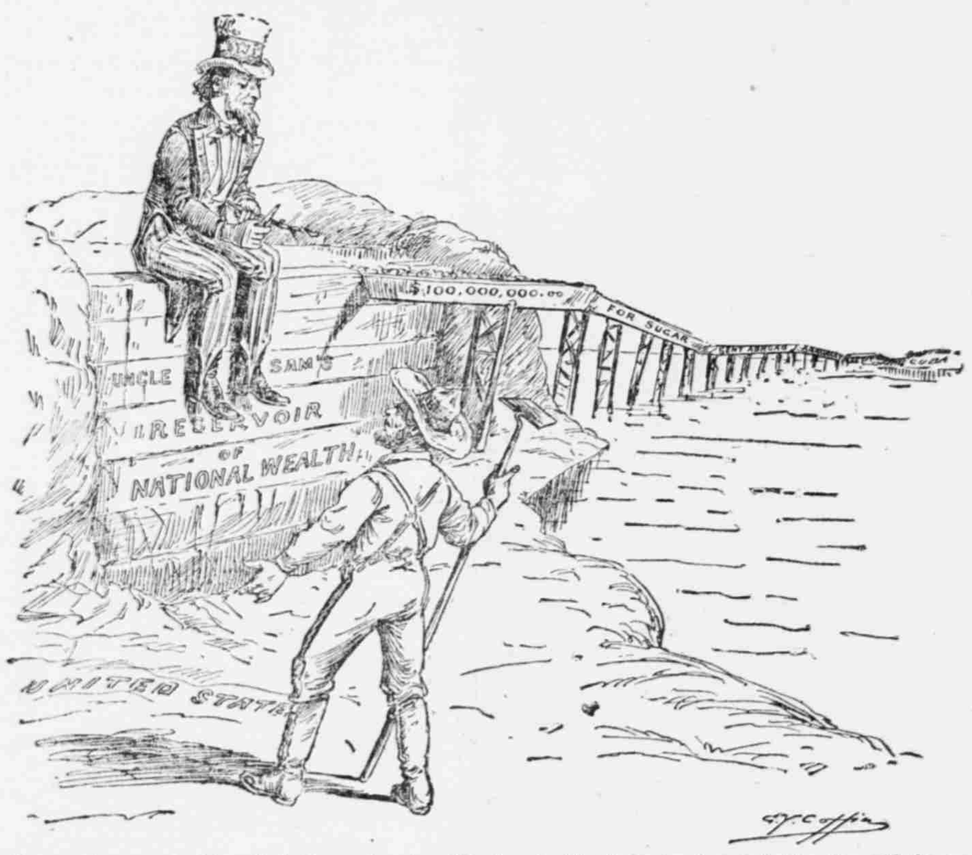
This want of reverence for rank reminds me of an incident in the Mexican war. In order to make a diversion in favor of our small force at Buena Vista, a body of the hardy backwoodsmen of Missouri was organized for service under Col. Doniphan, against the more northern States of Mexico.

THEY MADE A FINE RECORD

for themselves by gaining a complete victory over greatly superior forces at Sacramento. It is said that in this command the officers were on an equality with the men, and there was little or no pretense of discipline. Everything was decided by a kind of town-meeting arrangement. One thing must be said to their credit, however: they always voted to fight, without regard to the number of their enemies. When their short enlistment was over 14 of them came back by of Saltillo, passing through large towns full of enemies on their way, to see our army, which was located near the town, under command of Maj-Gens. Taylor and Wool. Now the latter, having taken such a prominent part in the battle of Buena Vista, was credited with Presidential aspirations. He was always a strict disciplinarian, and exacted great deference for his rank and position; but as these men from Doniphan's command were on their way home to Missouri, he felt inclined to give them a gracious reception, probably with the expectation

(Continued on Second page.)

AN IRRIGATION IDEA.



FARMER THRIFTY—Look here, Uncle Sam, can't we turn this river of gold on to our own farms to fertilize them with the guano of prosperity; one hundred million dollars in gold going out every year for sugar is an awful drain upon our wealth. The Germans have turned the golden stream into the pockets of their own farmers; why can't we do the same thing?

LETTERS FROM LIBBY.

Good Testimony as to How Prisoners Were Treated.

HOW HE WAS CAPTURED.

Provisions from the North Help Out the Scanty Ration.

SUFFERING FROM COLD.

How the Ill-Used Prisoners Spent their Time.

THE following letters were written by Adj't S. H. M. Byers, 5th Iowa, to his brother, while confined in Libby Prison, at Richmond, Va., during the Winter of 1863, '4:

LIBBY PRISON,
RICHMOND,
Dec. 8, 1863.

DEAR JOHN: A little after daylight, this morning, the doors of Libby Prison opened and received all the Union officers captured at the battle of Missionary Ridge on the 25th of November.

First of all, you will want to know how I got here at all. It is a plain story enough. We got too close to the rebels that afternoon of the assault. Gen. Matthies's Brigade advanced under the most awful artillery fire I ever experienced clear to the foot of the mountain, and by that time the enemy's musketry poured into our line so fiercely we were compelled to lie down and hug the ground close, or we would all have been killed. Pretty soon the cry came that the rebels were pouring through the tunnel under the Ridge, and were flanking us with an awful fire on our right.

Part of the 5th Iowa was ordered to rise up, run to the tunnel, and check this unexpected force. I never got on to my feet so unwillingly in all my life, for the space between the tunnel and where I was lying was swept with a hot fire of close musketry. In running across I passed many dead and wounded lying on the ground. Our crossing over to the tunnel was too late, for double lines of the enemy took advantage of the movement and hurried down the hill, firing as they came, and demanding our surrender. Most of our boys retreated quickly and got away; those at the immediate front were shot down or captured.

A SIGN OF THE TIMES.

Two big Mississippians ran up to me and yelled, "Lay down that sword, you —— Yankee son-of-a-gun!"

Before I could obey their summons and unbuckle my sword they both grabbed it, and very nearly killed each other for its possession. It was a new sword, and my big navy revolver went to keep it company; and I—I was a prisoner of war.

Our boys had scarcely fallen back out of range of the musketry, when Sherman's cannon in reserve

OPENED A FEARFUL FIRE

on the spot where we were standing and on the ridge above us.

"Get up that hill, quick," yelled my captors, "or your —— cannon will kill us all." There was no waiting to argue the question; but I never before climbed a hill under such circumstances. All three of us tried to get out of the range of the Yankee cannon as quickly as possible, for broken stones and branches of shivered trees were falling all about us. On my way up I turned for a moment and saw the Union lines toward our right advancing and driving everything before them. In 10 minutes I knew the battle had been won, though the rebel cannon near by me, as I crossed the top of the Ridge, kept up a tremendous fire on my retreating comrades.

Shortly we prisoners were formed in a line back of the ridge, and most of us were relieved of such superfluities as watches, pocket-books, etc. This robbery on the field was condemned by some of the officers next day, but that did not restore our lost valuables.

That night, while the rebel army was retreating, we prisoners, under a strong guard, footed it down the railroad track toward Atlanta.

I had slept but one night in a week, and could scarce keep on my feet; but march we had to, not this night only, but other nights and days. I had new, tight boots on, and in 24 hours my feet seemed torn to pieces; yet, bad as it all was, I am sure I slept some, walking on the ties. The others were as badly off as myself, but a blow or a threat would keep us on the move.

Before reaching Atlanta we took the cars (cattle cars, and 50 or 60 men in a car) for Richmond. We passed clear through the